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Kennedy Shooting Critic Defends Cover-Up Theory

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WEST HARTFORD — In any investigation of a shooting death, an attempt is made to establish the exact point where bullets hit, their trajectories in the victim's body and whether the bullets all came from the same gun.

Normally ballistics and forensic pathology that includes the use of X-rays, photography, surgery, spectrographic and neutron activation analysis and even the simple ruler are used to determine such information.

The several government investigations into the Nov. 22, 1963 assassination of President Kennedy, however, have resulted in reports containing conflicting information about his wounds.

David Lifton, author of a best-selling book on the Kennedy assassination, spoke to students at St. Joseph's College in West Hartford Wednesday about his theory that alteration of Kennedy's wounds accounts for the discrepancies.

Lifton — whose book, "Best Evidence," was published by MacMillan in January — says the wounds were secretly altered after the president's body left Dallas, where he was shot, and before it was placed on the autopsy table at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Md.

Critics of the government's handling of what they say is an unsolved murder case have charged over the years that the ever-changing reports on the location of Kennedy's wounds were part of a continuing cover-up.

They cite the fact that three reports place the president's wounds in different locations. And all three reports conflict with the original reports by Dallas physicians, which said Kennedy was hit in the neck and the head from the front.

Critics also cite the fact that most of the raw medical evidence, including autopsy notes and the first draft of the autopsy report, are missing or have been destroyed.

Lifton, 41, said Wednesday that his research into what he claims was the

alteration of the president's wounds began with his discovery in 1966 of an FBI report written by the two agents who attended the autopsy. They said that before the autopsy began, the surgeons mentioned there had been "surgery of the head area, namely, in the top of the skull."

After confirming the Dallas doctors' original impression that the president's head and neck wounds were inflicted by bullets fired from the front and after confirming that none of the Dallas doctors performed any surgery to the head area, Lifton said he went a step further by interviewing medical personnel who saw the body before the autopsy and by interviewing the military honor guard assigned to the president's casket.

Lifton showed a 22-minute film of interviews indicating that there may have been widespread tampering with evidence in Bethesda that night.

Dallas funeral attendant Aubrey Rike said in a filmed interview that the president's body was wrapped in sheets and placed in a bronze, ceremonial casket.

However, in Lifton's next interview, a medical technician at Bethesda, Paul O'Connor, said he received the body wrapped in a body bag that was carried to the autopsy table in a cheap shipping casket.

Chief Petty Officer Dennis David told Lifton the body arrived at Bethesda not in a Navy ambulance containing the ceremonial casket, but in a plain shipping casket in a black hearse.

"It's important that people who read my book have the chance to see these filmed interviews in order to assess for themselves the demeanor of the witnesses," Lifton said.

Lifton, who said he is working on a follow-up book to be published on the 20th anniversary of the assassination, is conducting an analysis of the Dallas doctors' observations of the president's wounds and is investigating the possibility that the wounds may have been altered at Walter Reed Army Hospital.